

VIBRATO

My Violin Story



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Gratitude

To the people before me and with me who have
made my life possible.

I hope I can contribute to other lives as much as
others have contributed to mine.

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My Violin Story, Part 1

This is the true story of how I met my first real violin, the mysterious power of the Meditation music over my soul and my tears, and where my 1904 Gold Medal violin ended up 20 years later.

This emotional story connected me to violins forever.

- How I Was First Transfixed by a Violin Sound
- Meditation, My First Tears, and *Being Split In Two*
- The Violin Shop and 3 Hours of Tears

- The Amati Violin
- My Teacher and The Little Girl
- 20 Years Later, Selling My Violin
- An Unexpected Twist in the Story

My Violin Story

I write this true story in the 63rd year of my life, 22 years after the events that I describe in the story below. The memories are still burned into my mind to this very day. They are utterly unforgettable.

I confess that I do not understand the events in this story, or how such things are even possible in this life. And yet they occurred. The events truly happened, just as I have recorded them below.

My First Real Violin Sound

It all began 22 years ago, one sunny Saturday afternoon, on my friend's wedding day.

I was 40 years old then, and believe it or not, I had never heard a real violin before in my entire life. I had seen pictures of them, and I'd heard them on records and the radio. But I had never heard a real violin before, in person.

That day in the summer sun, I was standing out on the deck of the wedding reception hall, looking out across a big pond at the beautiful trees on the other side of the valley.

Suddenly, I heard this incredible sound. It *electrified* me, and I shivered inside. I *felt* it. The sound went deep into the core of me somehow— instantly. Such *force*!

That was how I met my first violin. The sound would change my life forever.

I'd never heard such incredible sounds like that before, sounds that went so deep inside of me. I immediately turned around and went back inside the hall. I *hunted* the sound, searching for the source of that power over me, not knowing what it was.

Then I saw it. The source of the sound was a piano trio (violin, cello, piano) playing in the corner of the big dining room.

I tried not to be too obvious. Although I must have been—how could I not be? How naïve I was. I found the closest dining table to the trio, sat down sideways in a chair, and *stared* at them.

Yes, I stared. I confess it. My eyes never left the violin and the violinist. How could she make such sounds, so effortlessly? With just a little box violin and a bow? How could those sounds drive into me so deeply and so effortlessly? I was transfixed.

My friend had invited the trio players to stay for the reception dinner, which was rare for them. Normally, they play their music and leave immediately. The pianist and violinist stayed, and we shared a table for dinner. I visited with them, wanting to find out more.

It turned out the violinist was single like me, and we liked each other, so we started up a romance.

She was very private and protective about her violin music. In about two years of knowing her, I only

heard her play maybe six times, and two of those were public performances.

She called herself “a community player with a little extra.” But others who knew her well as a soloist called her a prodigy.

For the first few months of dating her, I had no intention of learning to play the violin. She was my focus, with her long blonde curls, not violins or music.

My memories of the power of her sounds on that first day were slipping away from my mind.

Little did I know how her power would return to my life again, more forceful than I could imagine.

Meditation Tears

Months later, one lazy summer afternoon in her living room, *it* happened. I was stabbed with a second spear of sound, *much* more electrifying than the first.

Who knew that such things could happen in this life? I certainly could not. Yet, it happened.

In the middle of our conversation on the couch that day, she turned to her 16-year-old daughter and said, “Please play that little accompaniment to Meditation, would you?”

She had a musical family. Her oldest daughter (in grade 12 at the time) eventually played piano at a national level and became a professor of music.

My girlfriend got up from the couch, picked up her violin, and with no warmup at all, the two of them started to play Meditation.

Please understand the context. A few moments earlier, I was chitchatting with my girlfriend and her daughter, relaxed, with nothing special on my mind. I had never heard the Meditation music before and had no idea about what was about to happen to me.

It was only seconds away in the future.

Within a few phrases of that music, played by those two on that day, I was suddenly crying tears, inside and out. Was it the music? The violin harmonics? The playing skill? I still don't know, to this very day.

Tears were running out of my eyes! It was unbelievable! And my emotions were in flight, rising and falling with the passion of the notes, locked in synchronization with that haunting melody.

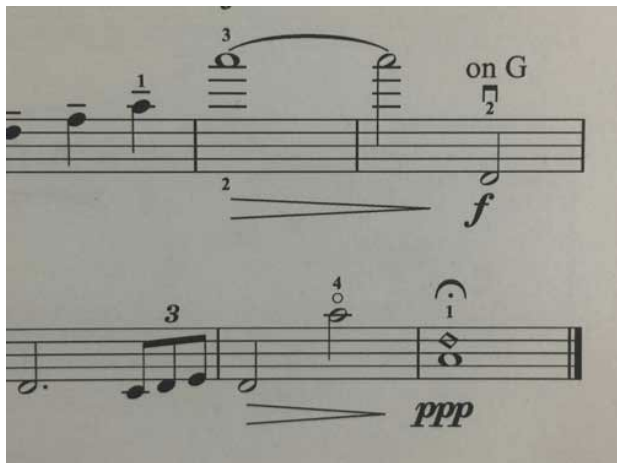
I couldn't believe it. The feelings inside me were uncontrollable and unstoppable. There I was, powerless—powerless to stop any of it. I felt myself *split* down the center of my mind.

The calm part of me watched my physical body fall into a turmoil of tears. I was dumbfounded.

Then, the emotional part of me split away, too. It was *me* who was in flight, soaring and plunging across the octaves with the melody. I was overwhelmed

with dizzying sensations. How could this be? What was happening to me?

Finally, that last high, oh, so very high, harmonic note of the Meditation faded into silence.



Then I *knew*. I knew that I had to try to play the violin. Anything with that much power over me had to be investigated.

If I played it myself, would it connect with my emotions like that? Would it make me cry? Would it *split* me in two? *On demand*? If I played it well?

I was crying helplessly under the power of her music. How was that possible?

She was the Pied Piper, and I was nothing more than a child, helpless and compelled, *compelled* to follow her music.

But such incredible music!

From the Gods, it was.

I vowed to find out more.

My First Violin Lesson

In the days and weeks that followed, like a child, I asked her constantly about violins. How hard were they to play? How should I go about it? How much did they cost? Where did the sounds come from?

I asked her to please teach me how to play like that. I was so naïve. I did not understand the difficulty of playing violin at the time. I did not understand what I was asking.

I was an adult who had never held a violin, while she was a child prodigy who had been playing violin for 30 or 40 years. Could the distance between our two viewpoints have been any farther apart?

She kindly and gently tried to steer me away from my goal of playing Meditation. She said that it was a very challenging piece to start with and was even more difficult for adult beginners.

In a mother's gentle way, as if speaking to a child, she explained that I would be starting the violin very late in life. It was much more normal for skilled violin students to start playing as very young children, rather than as an adult, as I was.

Knowing the skill levels of her adult students over the years, perhaps she was kindly trying to help

me avoid probable failure. Or maybe as a girlfriend, she didn't want the potential relationship problems of trying to teach her boyfriend the difficult skills of the violin. Who knows why?

But with my memories and emotions of that incredible crying day on her couch, I gently ignored her hints and persisted like a child with my desire for her to teach me. Eventually, she gave in and gave me my first lesson.

She said, "Hold the violin like this," and I did, with a little adjustment of the shoulder rest. She said, "Hold the bow like this," and I did. Then she said, "Now draw a long note on the bow like this," and I almost did.

My bow hand and elbow curved around from the shoulder the first time, and the bow hair skittered across the strings. My second bow stroke was much better. And my third stroke was true. I drew it long

and straight, with a full and even tone. And so, we began.

A few months later, she said that in 20 years of teaching many students, she had never seen any fresh student do what I had done that day. To just pick up a bow like that and hold the bow perfectly right on their first try, before ever drawing their first note.

I was surprised to hear that. I don't think of myself as particularly gifted, although she must have thought that I was, in some small way.

Instead, I think I just have a good physical and mental sense of feeling when things are out of balance. I can naturally feel when forces are at odds with each other, and when a motion is awkward.

On that day with the bow, I just did what I do with all such things. I just moved my body parts around on different paths until I felt the forces stop

fighting each other in my bow hand. And then I knew I was holding it right for fluid motion.

The Little Girl

I was not a big success as a new violin student.

I had good posture. And I had a nearly instant understanding of how the bow hold, the strokes, and the other mechanics of playing should work. Physics from school and my intuitive physical senses helped me.

But it was difficult for me to keep a steady beat. My intonation was not that good. And I sure didn't have anything close to perfect pitch in my hearing. I had many of the usual struggles.

One day, my teacher and her friend, the piano player, held a small joint recital for their students at the local elementary school. That's when I met my first violin student who had natural talent.

Among many other questions about the violin, I had asked my teacher about the influence of natural talent versus disciplined practice. Did you need to have natural talent to play Meditation the way she played it? Or would regular disciplined practice get you there?

She smiled at me and gently said, “You either have it or you don’t.”

Maybe her opinion was because she was a soloist prodigy herself. Or maybe it was because of teaching students for 20 years.

Or maybe she talked with other musicians and with her teacher friends, all of them having spent their lives in music, and teaching music. Who knows where her opinion came from? But it must be respected, I think.

She did not believe that hard work and practice would take you to the levels that natural talent would. She had spent her lifetime in music, with quite

a few professional players as company. Who was I to challenge her viewpoint?

Nonetheless, I thought her view on natural talent versus practice was a tiny bit harsh. It seemed to exclude many capable people from the upper reaches of their fields. And I thought it meant that I might never be able to play Meditation either, because I wasn't a player with her kind of natural talent.

I tried to change her mind a little bit by telling her about an interview that I had seen with Pavarotti. They asked him what he thought was the major cause of his success. Was it his natural voice talent?

He laughed out loud at the idea, smiled, and said something like "Oh no, not my voice. Some voice is necessary, yes, but I know of many people who have better voices than me."

"But I"—and Pavarotti smiled broadly here—"I have the ability to make practice interesting for

myself. And so, I practice a lot more than they do.” He laughed and smiled at the camera again.

But my teacher would have none of that. She was steadfast in her view. “Either you have it, or you don’t.”

And to state the obvious to readers here, she did not think that I had “it” either, even though she had been amazed at my instant bow hold and true bow strokes.

She was too kind to say it out loud to me, and I am grateful for that. She had a very gentle soul, and a gentle way of speaking too, as you already know.

Now, back to the recital, where I learned to understand her view about natural talent.

The piano/violin recital was held at a local elementary school. I was walking down one of the big hallways looking for my teacher during a break. I turned a corner, and there she was, with one of her little students.

She was a tiny little girl whose head was about as high as a normal table. She carried a tiny little 1/4 size, or 1/8 size violin, that I suppose could hardly be expected to resonate properly at all. And she had an even tinier little bow that looked like a 12-inch toy stick.

Right there in the middle of the empty hallway, my teacher stopped and bent far down to talk to the little girl. With a kind voice that you might use with a small child, she gently asked the little girl to play the song that they had been practicing in their lessons. And so, it happened.

Without wasting a heartbeat or being scared about performing in front of a stranger, the little girl nodded her head, put her violin up, and started playing for us. And the sound was ... *perfect!*

Where does such music come from? I will tell you from where—directly from the heavens.

Her rhythm, tone, intonation, speed, fluidity, musicality, phrasing, and dynamics were all magical. I was stunned and surprised, elated and disheartened, all at the same time.

Once again, I was in the presence of *something* that was *completely* beyond my understanding.

Music like that cannot be explained. How can a human possibly understand it? Not me. I could not.

My teacher told me later that the little girl could not read words and had never used a sheet of music in her life. And yet there she was in the middle of the big empty school hallway that day, playing effortlessly like she was connected straight to the heavens.

That was when I knew that I was in the presence of a *real* natural talent. *This* is what my teacher had been talking about when she said, “Either you have it or you don’t.”

This little girl was overflowing with “*it*” with no effort at all. And there I was in the hallway to see and hear her talent, right in front of me.

That’s when I knew for sure that I didn’t have that kind of talent, or anything close to it. Knowing about natural talent is one thing. But *experiencing* it right in front of you... Well, that’s a different thing entirely.

The gap between our talent levels felt impossibly large. I felt like I was nothing compared to the two players in front of me. It seemed futile for me to learn to play when I would never have that kind of talent and would never reach their playing levels.

I felt like Salieri asking God in the Amadeus movie, “Why do you give me the desire, but not the talent?”

I sighed. I would have to be content with enjoying my own journey, as best I could.

Testing High-End Violins

There's still another part to tell.

Keep in mind that I'd only heard my girlfriend play a few times in the year that we were together.

Once at the wedding (my first violin).

Once in her living room playing Meditation (my first tears).

Once, she practiced some complex piece of beauty in front of me, for only a minute or two.

And twice when she played in a public orchestra. It was a rare treat for me to hear her play.

One summer day, she said she wanted to go to the local violin shop because the owner had some violins for her to play. She knew the owner quite well.

She played on a high-end violin (a Bagatelle) that the owner had permanently loaned her to support her playing art.

He was one of the people who called her a prodigy. So off we went, my girlfriend and I, and her

14-year-old daughter (who was an opera singer, but that's another story). We drove up to the violin shop that Saturday afternoon, just after lunch.

The shop owner restored and traded high-end violins as a hobby in addition to his regular violin sales and service business.

But the problem was, he could not play well enough to put the high-end violins through their paces. So, he asked various symphony players to play the violins so that he could hear the sound qualities.

I had the sense that my girlfriend was his gold standard player because he had told me more than once that "No one could ever get a sound out of that violin except her."

There were about half a dozen high-end violins waiting for us when we arrived, and a dozen high-end bows as well. I say high-end because of the prices.

The violins were all in the range of \$15,000 to \$40,000. I was no judge of their prices, of course. But I knew they were all expensive, high-end instruments.

My girlfriend put the violins and bows through their paces. She picked three or four songs as her test set of music pieces to illustrate the characteristics of each pair of bow and violin for the shop owner.

There were slow notes, fast notes, vibrato, spiccato, and fast string changes. And probably many other techniques that only advanced violinists could understand. Her level of playing that day was far above my ability to intellectually understand it.

And then, without warning, I was in tears *again*.

Perhaps because I was there that day, she was playing Meditation as one of her test songs.

The Meditation music speared into me with all of its unstoppable force, splitting me in two again. More tears. More emotions. More helplessness. How was it possible?

She played the same set of test songs for three hours as she cycled through the different violins and bows. Over and over, my body split into two, as my tears and emotions soared and fell with the melody.

Was it the Meditation music? The harmonics? Her beautiful playing? Whatever it was, it would lock onto my emotions each time and turn on my tears.

I was overwhelmed and powerless to stop the emotional responses that her beautiful sounds pulled out of me.

But the truth was ... I didn't want it to stop.

It was a *magnificent* life experience, both intense and stunning. The emotions were becoming old and familiar friends. I *surrendered* and rode with the melody, the emotions, and the tears of it all.

Pause a moment and consider the context of these moments. The little violin shop was an old, converted WWII house. It was set back about 3 feet,

only the width of a sidewalk, from the highway, which was four lanes through the center of the city.



Everything on the highway was dirty and dusty outside that day, with trucks, buses, and tractor-trailers going by every few seconds, rumbling along. You could easily hear the noise inside the shop.

In the middle of all that dust and noise outside, only a few feet away, there was my girlfriend, standing in the middle of the tiny front room, playing her beautiful music on the violins.

And there I was, a grown man in the shop on a Saturday afternoon, trying to be inconspicuous while I stood in the corner crying. Could life create a scene with any more pathos?

Her 14-year-old daughter was embarrassed by it all. She moved away from me and stood in another far corner of the shop, trying to look away. She had no idea what to do with her mother's boyfriend crying in the corner.

I saw the owner look at me once, and he nodded his head, as if he understood, that I understood, the power of her music. By the end of the three hours, I was drained both physically and emotionally. What an experience.

But it wasn't over yet. Life had one more emotional peak for me to climb.

An Old and Broken Violin

Towards the end of the day, all the bows and violins had been played. The owner smiled at my girlfriend and said that it seemed appropriate to bring out the Amati violin because it would complete the comparison with the other violins. She agreed, so he went downstairs to his vault and brought up an old violin.

The old violin had its own special story. Some people had brought it into the shop one day, broken into pieces, in a little box. Someone had sat on it or something, many, many years ago.

They thought it might once have been valuable, because it was very old, and because it had been handed down through generations of their family.

But they didn't know how much it would be worth as a basket case of broken pieces. They brought it to the owner to see what their options were.

No one could tell what it would sound like, even if he managed to put it back together. In the end, they agreed on a price, and he took a chance and bought the pieces for several thousand dollars.

The old violin in the shop that day did not even have a label inside. I saw it. It wasn't shiny. It wasn't beautiful. Instead, it looked old, and grey, and *weathered*.

The shop owner said he thought it was an Amati because it was obviously very, very old. And it seemed to have many of the same shapes and physical characteristics of the early Amati violins of the time.

Keep in mind that it was the Amati family who taught the Stradivari family how to build violins.

Wikipedia says, “The oldest confirmed surviving violin, dated inside, is the Charles IX by Andrea Amati, made in Cremona in 1564, but the label is doubtful.”

The shop owner had patiently fixed the old violin. It turned out that it did play very well, but only in the right player’s hands. For the most part, he just kept it in his vault. He didn’t want to sell it, and it was very touchy to play. He said, “Not just anyone could get a sound out of it.”

My girlfriend had played it once for a solo concert event, when, for some reason, her usual Bagatelle violin was not functioning properly.

That was the context of that special Saturday afternoon.

There was the very old, broken violin, coming down through 16 generations of history from the mid-1500s or so, some 400 years ago. First alive, then broken into pieces, then resurrected.

There was the Meditation music, coming down through four generations or so, some 100 years ago. Its composer, Massenet, had long since passed into the next life.

There was my prodigy girlfriend, whose path in life in this world had not always been as beautiful as her music.

And there was I, physically and emotionally drained after three hours of tears.

That was how our paths all touched and fused together into an unforgettable experience in those few hours on that Saturday afternoon, in that tiny little 25-foot-wide WWII house next to the highway.

And then, the Amati.

I was only a layman, having heard my first real violin scarcely one year before.

What would I know about the difference between an Amati (if it were an Amati) and all the rest of those high-end violins? What would I know of such things? Nothing. Nothing. I make no claim to such knowledge.

But on the other hand, I had a special sensitivity to the Meditation melody when she played it. Her music could stab into me and force me into tears within moments. I was somehow *connected* to that music in some special spiritual way.

And, I had just been listening and crying to the music of high-end violins for three hours. So, you might be willing to allow that I was prepared for one more comparison, even if I was only a layman.

She started playing the Amati, and the sound was in a realm of its own. The violin was easily head and shoulders above all the rest. The tone, the harmonics, the *projection*, the emotional power...they are all indescribable by me.

I sometimes fancy that I am an articulate man, but I have no words to describe the sounds that day. From the heavens they were, all of them—the violin, the bow, the music, and the player. Oh, the sounds they made!

The sounds were *ethereal* when the phrases climbed and soared up into the high octaves next to the heavens. Then mournful and melancholy, when the notes fell back to earth and cascaded into the low strings. The range and contrast in sounds were stunning.

Then she would play a penetrating vibrato that would *cut* through everything—*everything*. The tractor-trailers were rumbling on the highway only 12 feet away from her, but the vibrato from that violin was so strong and crystal clear that the road noise was forgotten. (I apologize. I just don't have the words.) The vibratos were so intense that I could feel the pulses in my chest.

The strength of that sound was indescribable. But there it was in the room that day, for all to hear.

I thought of natural talent again, and knew that this quadruplet of violin, bow, music, and player had “*it*” in impossible dimensions. My mind was reeling with emotions and tears. I had no relevant anchor in my life to relate it to.

I apologize for my repetition here. But over and over, I wondered... How were these sounds possible? From a little unpolished wooden box, a stick, some horsehair, some strings, and from a special player.

Where did the sound and power come from? From the Gods, I thought—straight from the Gods. It was impossible. But it was happening in front of me.

And yes, I cried one more time. With emotions, joy, sadness, and helplessness. All of them were inseparably joined together. I felt my soul *leave me* to follow the music when she played Meditation on the Amati.

Even her daughter paid attention to *this* violin.

It was only once in a lifetime for me, but it was burned into my soul and memory forever.

And the randomness of it all! First hearing her violin at my friend's wedding, then my first Meditation tears in her living room, then the little girl, and more tears at the high-end violin testing.

Finally, the Amati and the Meditation music. Both travelling down through hundreds of years of history to that focus point in my girlfriend's hands, on a Saturday afternoon in the little violin shop.

I don't pretend to understand what happened there, that day. Such events are beyond human understanding, I think. And yet, they happened.

All I can do is to be eternally grateful that I was there that day as a witness to the greatness of those moments, never to forget what I had experienced.

Interlude

Before continuing with part two of my violin story, I thought it might be interesting for you to take a short break.

Here is a favorite poem of mine that I memorized as a young boy of about ten years old, half a century ago.

It came from my mother's poetry book, *Best Loved Poems of the American People*. It reminds me of the Amati violin that I heard played on that day.

I hope you enjoy it.

The Touch of The Master's Hand

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile:
“What am I bidden, good folks,” he cried,
“Who’ll start the bidding for me?”
“A dollar, a dollar”; then, “Two!” “Only two?
Two dollars, and who’ll make it three?
Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;
Going for three----” But no,
From the room, far back, a gray-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then, wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loose strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet
As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said: “What am I bid for the old violin?”
And he held it up with the bow.
“A thousand dollars, and who’ll make it two?”

Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
Three thousand, once, three thousand, twice,
And going, and gone," said he.
The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand
What changed its worth." Swift came the reply:
"The touch of a master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.
A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine;
A game--and he travels on.
He is "going" once, and "going" twice,
He's "going" and almost "gone."
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.

--Myra Brooks Welch

My Violin Story, Part 2

After spending three emotional hours with high-end violin sounds that day, I wanted to upgrade my student violin. It wasn't even close to having a sound that could make me cry when my girlfriend played it.

Upgrading My Violin

One day, my girlfriend and I went up to the little violin shop to see if we could find a violin for me. Life cooperated, as you will see, perhaps so that it could add more turns to my story.

The shop owner had prepared for our visit by laying out a half-dozen violins, some of them from his vault. He also opened two large bow cases, each containing a dozen bows or more.

It was my turn to cycle through the violins and bows while my girlfriend and the shop owner listened to my playing, such as it was.

I could hardly play a tune at the time. I had only been taking lessons for a month or two. My rhythm was spotty, and my intonation left much to be desired. For the violin testing, I was reduced to drawing long bow strokes on open strings.

Each time we found a combination of violin and bow that had a decent sound, the shop owner would go into the back room to judge the quality of the tone and projection.

Keep in mind that good violins are incredibly sensitive instruments. The violin, the bow, and the player form a triplet that is coupled together in some magical way.

When the triplet is right, the sound is noticeably improved. When the triplet is wrong, the sound is noticeably diminished. No one knows exactly why. It's a mystery. But you must always seek out the best triplet when you buy a good violin.

I remember playing with a \$15,000 French-made bow. It was a beautiful piece of work. But in my hands, there was no special sound at all. Even I could tell that it was no match for my triplet. I also played several high-end violins.

But the magic wasn't there yet. Both my girlfriend and the shop owner agreed on that.

Finding My Triplet

After an hour, we found the right violin for me. It was a beautiful instrument made by John Friedrich and Sons in 1900 in New York.

Inside was a label that said, "This instrument was granted highest awards, Grand Prize and Gold Medal, St. Louis World Exposition 1904."



I had no knowledge of its heritage when I picked it up to play. I was such a novice that I didn't even know that violins contained heritage labels inside.

But I knew that it was the one for me as soon as I picked it up and played on it a bit. I could feel the flawless fit to my body and hand, and the sound was beautiful under my ear.

Two-thirds of my triplet had formed.

I tried all the bows from the big case, one by one, priced both low and high. I was too much of a novice to make a good judgment on the overall triplet sound. The shop owner and my girlfriend were more concerned with the tone of the sound from 10 feet away and whether it would project enough to fill a room.

Still not satisfied after I had played all the bows in the case, the owner went to the vault and brought out a matched set of violin and bow, made by E. Hermann.

I noticed that the bow was gold-wrapped, something I had never seen before. The shop owner said that the gold wrapping meant that the bow was the bow maker's very best work.

I picked up the bow, and it instantly felt right in my hand. Was it the balance? Was it the weight? I don't know why. Violin bows vary in mass by only a

gram or two, one way or the other, on a 60-gram bow. That doesn't seem like much, does it?

It's hard for a layperson to understand how much difference the weight and balance can make. But the balance in that bow fit my hand perfectly, and everyone in the room could easily hear that the sound was much better than anything before.

The owner split up the matched set so that I could have the bow, and my triplet was formed for the next 22 years.

Oh... and yes, the violin had enough harmonics to make me cry when she played *Meditation* on it. That's how I knew that the violin could touch the heavens.





Life Moved On

Within a few months of that time, my girlfriend and I split up and went our separate ways.

I carried the violin around with me for 22 years. I knew that I was the steward of this beautiful instrument that had come down through history.

I felt sad, sometimes, that I hardly played it over the years. I was climbing other mountains and reaching for other goals in life, and I could not devote the time that learning to play Meditation required.

The years passed, and I grew older. From time to time, I would take the violin out of its velvet case, tune it up, and play a few notes as best I could. But it wasn't much.

Even simple songs were beyond me now. It had all slipped away.

I would polish the violin carefully as I thought of my dreams and memories. Then I would put it away until next time.

I often thought of selling it, and of passing it into the next set of loving hands. They would play it more, I thought.

Once I put it up for a consignment sale, for a year or more. But it did not sell, and I felt much better when I had it back with me. I knew that I was still connected to my triplet in some strange way.

Selling My Violin

Where does all the time go? One day, I decided to do whatever was necessary to pass the violin into the hands of someone who would play it.

I had abandoned my dream of playing Meditation, since I hadn't played it in 20 years.

To prepare for the sale, I wanted to get the bow and violin checked out by a luthier before trying to sell them. I took them to a good violin shop to get the work done since the little violin shop had closed.

When I went to pick up the finished violin, both the luthier and shop owner commented on the exceptional beauty of the instrument and on its Grand Prize heritage label.

They were both very interested in the instrument. I told the luthier and the shop owner a bit of the history of how the violin came into my hands and a bit of my Meditation story.

Visiting My Teacher

Much to my surprise, the shop owner said, “She’s still teaching in the city, you know.” I hadn’t been in contact with my teacher-girlfriend for many years.

I thought it over for a moment, then asked the shop owner for her phone number, phoned her up, and drove over the next day for a visit.

It turned out that her beloved Bagatelle violin and bow triplet were being broken up after two decades together. The owner of the little violin shop had passed away years ago, and his widow had recently requested the return of the violin to close the shop and sell the inventory.

Keep in mind that my teacher had been intimately connected to her violin and music for her entire life, both teaching and playing. She was devastated to lose her beloved violin after forming such a strong emotional bond with it.

My teacher showed me her original violin from when she was a student. This student violin was to replace the Bagatelle for her teaching practice. She had tried to tune it up only days ago, but the bridge broke with the stress, and the pegs weren't right.

She showed it to me. It was a mess. Nothing close to the beauty of the Bagatelle violin. It was a

giant step backward to her student days, in both time and violin quality.

It was obvious to me that the student violin sound would be nothing close to that of her Bagatelle, which had made me cry so many years ago.

All this meant that she had no violin to teach her students on Monday, only two days away.

Life is inexplicable, I thought.

It seemed to me that she and I were characters in a movie with many twists and turns in the story.

I knew within seconds that I would leave my violin with her that day, and so I did. I knew it would improve her life and that she would care for it.

A few months later, she gave the bow back to me. She didn't like it because it was a little too heavy for her at the frog. Her triplet wasn't quite right with that bow. But she really liked the violin. She said it sounded better and better the more she played it.

Life is artistic, is it not? Who among us could foretell the twists and turns of this violin story?

Not me. I have no such power. All I can do in this life is to hope that I play my part well.

Even as I write this last entry, I wonder if the story is over yet. Or if another turn is up ahead, waiting patiently to surprise me when I arrive there in the future.

Only time will tell...

